

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 18, 2021

President Joseph Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write to you about the enduring interests and ideals that should continue to guide our efforts in Afghanistan even as our armed forces end their mission there. You have rightly pledged continued support for Afghanistan's legitimate government and its efforts to preserve the democratic gains Afghans have won at great cost with our help over the last 20 years. We hope you will continue to make clear that America's policy in Afghanistan is to ensure the survival and success of that government and of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, and to stand by those Afghans who bet their lives on the future we promised them.

The capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces will determine whether the Taliban succeeds in reimposing medieval rule over Afghanistan's 40 million people; whether al Qaeda and ISIS reestablish terrorist sanctuary there; and whether the country once again unravels in civil war. If there is any prospect of a just peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, moreover, it will happen only after the Afghan military demonstrates to the Taliban that their insurgency will not triumph on the battlefield.

Given the extraordinary importance of the Afghan army and the multi-year international investment in its development, we need a strategy to sustain our Afghan military partners once our own troops are gone. As you know, while Afghans have long borne the overwhelming brunt of the counterterrorism fight in their country, they remain heavily dependent on U.S. and international enablers, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets and maintenance and repair for their equipment. While most of these functions are being provided by contractors, the Taliban-US agreement will compel their departure as well. There have also been reports that Turkey is considering removing their security forces that currently protect Kabul International Airport.

We would support continued U.S. funding to help Afghanistan maintain critical military capabilities. As you know, the Taliban-US agreement prohibits the United States from hiring contractors or US sending uniformed personnel to assist the Afghans. However, the Afghan government is still permitted to hire its own contractors. As such, we urge you to initiate an aggressive dialogue to establish a clear legal basis under which Afghan national forces could continue to purchase security assistance services and under which contractors and Defense officials could continue to provide the support to Afghan forces to which we have already committed.

In addition to our continued efforts to equip and train the Afghan military, including by leaving behind equipment, we would specifically endorse the continued provision to Afghan government forces of purely defensive ISR information on imminent operations being staged against government forces. We encourage you to explore potential basing options in the region to conduct such missions. Such arrangements will be vital in any case as a hedge against the reemergence of an international terrorist safe haven in Afghanistan. In addition, should the Taliban continue its efforts to remove the Afghan government by force, we believe it is time to consider seriously a tougher approach against its international backers, including potential sanctions.

The U.S. military leadership is appropriately focused on the safe redeployment of American troops from Afghanistan. The overwhelming demands of the retrograde may make it difficult to simultaneously execute the strategy of sustainment for our Afghan military partners to which we have committed. Given the emerging complexity of this mission, we would recommend that you appoint a senior military commander or Defense official to coordinate it and provide it with the attention it deserves.

The assassinations of Afghan civic leaders attributed to the Taliban and recent horrific bombing of a girls school show how determined anti-government forces in Afghanistan are to destroy the country's progress, and the dangers Afghans committed to that progress will face. We will support generous U.S. funding for Afghanistan's civil society and for its social and economic development. But international assistance will only help if there is security for the Afghan people and proper on-the-ground oversight of that aid. And if security deteriorates, those Afghans most at risk may need to find safety elsewhere.

The United States has a particular obligation to the thousands of Afghan citizens who have supported U.S. operations, including as translators, contractors, and security personnel. We must move swiftly to expedite life-saving programs that provide a path to safety for those who loyally worked alongside U.S. troops, diplomats, and contractors. To that end, we will work with you to address challenges facing the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Programs in providing the response necessary to address this issue over the next few months.

Other Afghans, including women's rights activists, civic leaders, journalists, and elected officials, would face a credible fear of persecution if the Taliban return to power. Many do not want to leave their country now, and we would not want to encourage a rush to the exits. But given how slowly our refugee procedures move, and the lack of in-country processing, some may feel they have no choice but to try to get out now while they can. We would encourage you to develop a system of in country processing of Afghans in this category that allows them to submit their information for vetting now, even if they have not yet decided to leave, so that we can move to help them more quickly should that becomes necessary in the future.

These continued efforts to strengthen governance, protect marginalized people, and minimize the threat of violent extremism in Afghanistan will require one strategy that ties our diplomatic, defense, and development activities. The *Global Fragility Act of 2019* (PL 116-94; 28 U.S.C. Sec. 9801-9810) established a framework to create these strategies, after bipartisan recognition that addressing state instability requires a three-pronged approach of development, defense, and

diplomacy. Your administration has not yet identified the five priority countries to receive such a strategy, as is legally required. We ask that you identify those countries quickly and select Afghanistan as one of them. We owe our Afghan partners and our servicemembers a thoughtful strategy that will improve conditions on the ground. If we delay, the security situation may deteriorate, and we may find ourselves falling back on old tactics to respond to an urgent crisis.

We thank you for your attention to these matters and look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

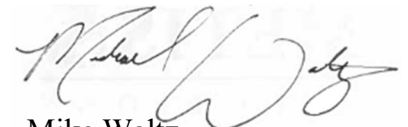
Respectfully,



Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Jim Langevin
Member of Congress



Mike Waltz
Member of Congress



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



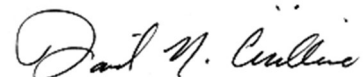
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